



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## VA RECEIVES JANSSEN COVID-19 VACCINE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) received 71,400 doses of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine, March 3, authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration under an Emergency Use Authorization.

In clinical trials, the Janssen vaccine showed an efficacy of 66% against moderate to severe/critical COVID-19 disease occurring at least 28 days after vaccination — and demonstrated greater than 85% efficacy in preventing severe/critical COVID-19 disease occurring at least 28 days after vaccination.

“The VA now has a third highly effective vaccine to support the department’s critical efforts in vaccinating veterans,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone M.D. “This one-dose vaccine will help us vaccinate more people faster and will help us effectively reach more veterans, including those in rural areas.”

As of March 3, the VA provided Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccine first doses to more than 1,648,000 veterans, employees, and federal partners — and both doses to more than 925,000 of these individuals.

Veterans who are enrolled and receiving health care in VA are eligible to get the vaccine when their facility has vaccine supply and reaches their risk category. Veterans are required to enroll with the VA in order to receive health care. However, to receive care in the VA, enrollees must meet certain eligibility requirements under current law, which may include income limits.

Veterans can get the latest information and sign up to receive updates on VA’s [COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#).

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Staffing/VSO Changes.....	2
VA Genetic Research .....	3
VA Finance Program .....	4
RED .....	5
VA/Salesforce Partnership.....	6
Veterans Group Life.....	7
Midwest Honor Flight.....	8
Culvers Day of Giving.....	9
Upcoming Events.....	10

# BORRIES JOINS PENNINGTON COUNTY CVSO TEAM

Pennington County has selected Robert “Lee” Borries as their new county veterans service officer. Lee replaces Alan Taylor who moved to North Carolina to be closer to family.

Borries was born in Ocean Springs, Mississippi and was raised in that area and graduated from St. Martin High School in May 1998. In January 1999, shortly after graduating high school, he joined the United States Air Force as a Propulsions Systems Technician. He served more than 21 years in the Air Force, and retired in January 2020, as a Senior Master Sergeant.

His duty locations include assignments to Aviano AB, Italy, Whiteman AFB, Missouri and two tours of duty at Ellsworth AFB. Prior to his retirement, he was the Maintenance Superintendent for the 28<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Maintenance Squadron at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota.

While in the Air Force, Lee earned multiple professional certifications in varying disciplines. He also has two Associate of Applied Science degrees in Aircraft Maintenance Technology and Instructor of Technology and Military Science. He obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Management from National American University in 2013. He also received a Master of Science degree in Industrial Management with a Graduate Certificate in Lean Six Sigma from the University of Central Missouri in 2017.

Please join us in welcoming Lee to our network. Lee’s email address is: [Lee.Borries@pennco.org](mailto:Lee.Borries@pennco.org).



# ILES JOINS SDDVA TEAM

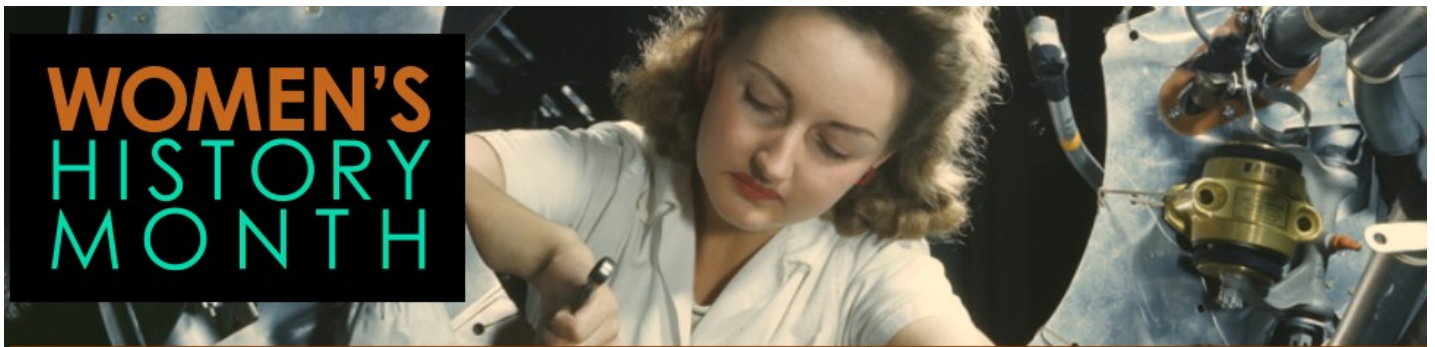
DJ Iles has joined the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs team and will serve as a veterans service officer in the Sioux Falls Claims Office.

After serving as a U. S. Marine and as a police detective in the Deep South, DJ worked for several years with the VHA as both a nurse and a VA police officer at VAMC, Sioux Falls. He is now one of the newest veterans service officers serving our state’s veterans. He’s the proud father of two grown daughters, and spends much of his free time staying fit and writing novels.

Please join us in welcoming DJ to our team. DJ’s email address is: [De-maree.iles@va.gov](mailto:De-maree.iles@va.gov)



# VA TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN VETERANS IN GENETIC RESEARCH TO AID IN IMPROVING WOMEN'S HEALTH



On this first day of [Women's History Month](#), the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched efforts to increase women veteran participation in the VA's [Million Veteran Program](#) (MVP) to aid in genetic research focused on women health issues.

MVP is currently researching genetic and clinical markers to predict breast cancer risk in women veterans.

"While there are roughly 2 million living women veterans, only 75,000 are currently enrolled in MVP representing only 9% of the MVP cohort," said VA Assistant Secretary Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Kayla Williams, who is also an MVP participant. "If more women veterans consider joining, VA researchers would have a larger gene pool to be able to study women's health in greater detail and offer women the specialized care they need and deserve."

With increased participation, research could focus on investigating treatments and preventions of diseases that affect women veterans including depression, hypertension, heart disease, osteoarthritis and others.

Since 2011 more than 830,000 veterans have joined MVP, allowing researchers to learn how differences in genes, lifestyle, and military experiences affect veterans' health and illnesses.

Participation in MVP is entirely voluntary and veterans go through an informed consent process to ensure MVP is right for them.

To learn more about enrolling in MVP click [on their website](#) or by calling 866-441-6075. For more information about VA research, including MVP research program, visit VA's [Office of Research and Development](#).

# VA FINANCE PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) [Veterans Benefits Banking Program](#) (VBBP) reached a new milestone with more than 50,000 veterans having switched to receiving their monetary benefits through direct deposit.

VBBP was created in partnership with the Association of Military Banks of America (AMBA) and works with the Defense Credit Union Council (DCUC) to leverage their combined consortium of military-friendly, federally insured financial institutions to help veterans acquire a secure bank account.

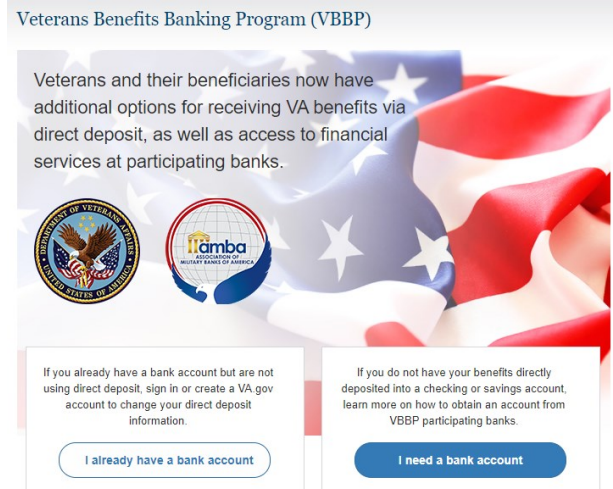
Veterans who do not have an account with a financial institution must receive their benefit payments through a paper check or pre-paid debit card, which puts them at an increased risk for fraud and subject to high service fees.

"At any given time, there are more than 175,000 veterans without a bank or credit union account," said Acting Under Secretary with the Veterans Benefits Administration Thomas Murphy. "It is the VA's responsibility to ensure veterans and their families get the benefits they have earned — on time, every time. VBBP is just one way we are working to make that happen."

Since the program's inception in December 2019, the number of veterans who rely on paper checks and pre-paid debit cards for their benefits has steadily decreased. While services available will vary among financial institutions, VBBP makes it easier for veterans to choose a bank or credit union based on how these services align with their individual banking needs.



VA, AMBA, and DCUC do not endorse any bank or credit union and veterans are not required to use a VBBP bank or direct deposit to receive their monetary benefits.

Click here to learn more about [VBBP](#) or find a participating financial institution.



Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP)

Veterans and their beneficiaries now have additional options for receiving VA benefits via direct deposit, as well as access to financial services at participating banks.

If you already have a bank account but are not using direct deposit, sign in or create a VA gov account to change your direct deposit information.

[I already have a bank account](#)

If you do not have your benefits directly deposited into a checking or savings account, learn more on how to obtain an account from VBBP participating banks.

[I need a bank account](#)



**VA** Veterans Benefits Banking Program  
**1-800-827-1000**

[benefits.va.gov/banking](https://benefits.va.gov/banking)  
[veteransbenefitsbanking.org](https://veteransbenefitsbanking.org)



# SDDVA AND SDDOM TEAMS DONNED THE RED IN SUPPORT OF OUR TROOPS DEPLOYED



SDDVA—State Veterans Home Team



Team Bullerman — Two generations donning the red



SDDOM Team at Camp Rapid

Last Friday, SDDVA and SDDOM teams donned the red in support of all our troops that are deployed—highlighting soldiers and airmen with the SDNG's 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and the 114th Fighter Wing currently deployed overseas.

Special thanks to Team Bullerman for multi-generational support! HOOAH!



SDDVA Pierre Team



SDDVA Sioux Falls Claims Office

# VA PARTNERSHIP STREAMLINES VETERANS ACCESS TO CARE AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is partnering with customer relationship management company Salesforce to improve access to essential VA services and resources among homeless and at-risk veterans.

The [Status Query and Response System \(SQUARES\)](#) is a VA web application first created in 2015 to provide external homeless service organizations with reliable and detailed information about veteran eligibility.

Thanks in part to the VA and Salesforce collaboration, the updated and expanded version of SQUARES lets VA partner organizations easily verify veterans' eligibility for VA homeless programs in real-time.

"Providing safe and stable housing to our nation's veterans is a department priority," said VA Executive Director for the Homeless Programs Office Monica Diaz. "The use of SQUARES helps enhance access to VA care and services among Veterans facing housing crises."

SQUARES has been vital during the COVID-19 pandemic in assisting food pantries, homeless service providers, state agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations in swiftly connecting vulnerable veterans to VA's homeless prevention, rapid rehousing and wraparound supportive services.

"Providing the backbone for SQUARES demonstrates how the cloud helps the government move faster, extend its impact into the community and connect veterans who are experiencing homelessness to the benefits they earned while serving our country," said Dave Rey, president of Salesforce's global public sector. "More than 2,100 partner organizations — including state Veteran agencies, state and local health and human services groups and nonprofit homeless service providers — are already using SQUARES to provide better care to Veterans across the country."

VA and Salesforce will convene virtual workshops to educate users about SQUARES and its features. The two will also create videos and case studies to educate registered users and potential new users on how to use the online tool.



# PREMIUM REDUCTIONS COMING TO ENROLLEES OF VETERANS GROUP LIFE INSURANCE

All Veterans insured under [Veterans' Group Life Insurance](#) (VGLI) will receive a reduction in premiums effective April 1, ensuring that VGLI remains a cost effective option for veterans and transitioning uniform service members who choose United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) insurance products.

Premiums for VGLI will be reduced by an average of 7% across all age groups — allowing separating service members to continue their [Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance](#) coverage level as a renewable term insurance policy after leaving service.

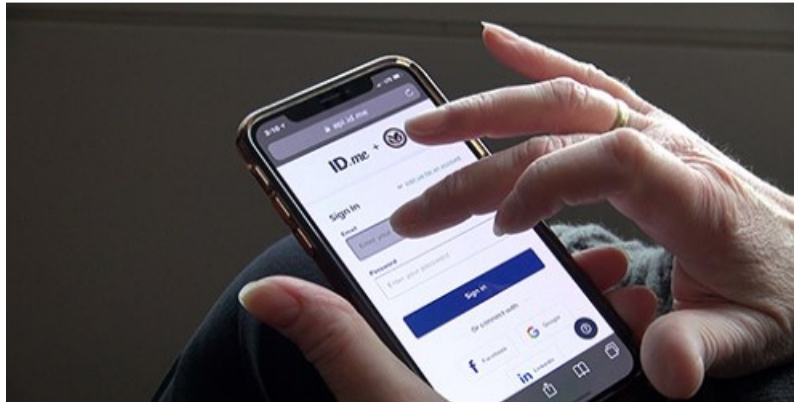
“The reduction in VGLI premiums will make life insurance even more affordable for veterans,” said Acting Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “Offering our veterans better rates for their life insurance as they transition to civilian life is just one effort the Department is taking to address the needs of our customers.”

While any separating service member who has SGLI coverage upon separation is eligible to sign up for VGLI after separation, they must submit their application and initial premium within 240 days after leaving the military to apply without proof of good health. Those who apply after the 240-day period but before the deadline of one year and 120 days from separation will need to submit proof of good health by completing a questionnaire regarding medical conditions.

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA is temporarily extending the application deadlines for VGLI by an additional 90 days beyond the initial 240-day period and the one year and 120 day-period, referenced above, to offer more flexibility to separating service members. This enrollment extension will remain in effect until June 2021.

Click on these links to learn more about [VA Insurance](#), the [new VGLI rates](#), [calculating your insurance needs](#) and [opening an application](#).

## Life Insurance







# HONOR RIDE

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## MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT



***Sunday, June 13, 2021 | 2:30 PM***

Registration begins at 12:30 PM at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance. Honor a Veteran you know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before an escort to the new South Dakota State Cemetery.

**MORE INFORMATION & PRE-REGISTRATION:**  
**MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE**

*Midwest Honor Flight is a 100% volunteer organization.  
All proceeds from this event go directly towards future  
Honor Flight and more importantly, our local Veterans.*



# MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT DAY OF GIVING



On Tuesday, March 23, 2021, participating Culver's restaurants in Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota will donate 10% of sales to Midwest Honor Flight.

The mission: to fly WWII, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans to see their memorials in Washington, DC.

Enjoy a delicious meal, benefit a great cause and feel good all over!

A representative of the Midwest Honor Flight will be present at each location from 5-8pm.

Thank you for your support.

## IOWA

Culver's of Sioux Center  
Culver's of Sioux City Locations

## SOUTH DAKOTA

Culver's of Rapid City locations  
Culver's of Mitchell  
Culver's of Yankton  
Culver's of Aberdeen  
Culver's of Sioux Falls locations  
Culver's of Spearfish

## MINNESOTA

Culver's of Marshall



[culvers.com](http://culvers.com)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Mar 19—Free Drop-In Legal Clinic—DAV—1519 W. 51st Street—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)

Mar 20—Free Drop-In Legal Clinic—VFW—520 Main Avenue—Brookings—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)

Mar 23—Culvers Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser

Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—2:30 pm

June 24-27—American Legion State Convention—Huron

Aug 16-19—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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